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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 1. Political affairs

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1.1 The overall objectives of the programme are to assist States involved in disputes or conflicts to resolve their differences peacefully in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and, wherever possible, to prevent conflicts from arising. The programme is of particular relevance in meeting the challenge to promote peace in a dynamic context of globalization, democratization, marginalization and fragmentation.

1.2 The Department of Political Affairs is responsible for the implementation of this programme and for the achievement of its objectives. Subsumed under programme 1 are elements that formerly constituted subprogrammes 1, Good offices, preventive diplomacy and peacemaking, and 3, Research, collection and analysis of information, of programme 1, Good offices, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, research and the collection and analysis of information; programmes 2, Political and Security Council affairs; 3, General Assembly affairs; 4, Special political questions, trusteeship and decolonization; 5, Question of Palestine; and 7, Disarmament, of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, as revised.

1.3 The mandate for programme 1 lies in the responsibilities entrusted to the Secretariat in the Charter of the United Nations, including Article 99 thereof, by the General Assembly in its recent resolutions 47/120 A of 18 December 1992, entitled "An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy and related matters" and 47/120 B of 20 September 1993, entitled "An Agenda for Peace"; and by the Security Council, as well as in other resolutions of those bodies in the fields of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-building, disarmament affairs, electoral assistance and the provision of secretariat services to principal organs.

1.4 Accordingly, execution of this broad programme will require:

(a) Monitoring, analysing and assessing political developments throughout the world;

(b) Identification of potential or actual conflicts in whose control and resolution the United Nations could play a useful role;

(c) Recommendations to the Secretary-General on appropriate action in cases referred to in (b) above and executing or assisting in the execution of the approved policy;

(d) Assistance to the Secretary-General in carrying out activities decided on by him and/or mandated by the General Assembly and the Security Council in the areas of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building, including arms limitation and disarmament;

(e) Providing the Secretary-General with analysis, assessment and advice on all disarmament matters and carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to the Secretariat in the field of arms limitation and disarmament;

(f) Providing the Secretary-General with advice on requests for electoral assistance and implementing or coordinating the implementation of such programmes;

(g) Providing the Secretary-General with support in the political aspects of his relations with Member States;

(h) Provision of secretariat services to the General Assembly, the Security Council and their subsidiary organs, as well as the Trusteeship Council if the need arises.

Subprogramme 1.1 Prevention, control and resolution of conflicts

1.5 In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in activities related to the maintenance of peace and security as a result of which the Secretary-General has been requested to play a proactive role. The primary objective of this subprogramme, which is implemented by the regional divisions of the Department, is to support the Secretary-General in the discharge of his responsibilities to assist in preventing, controlling and resolving conflicts around the world.

1.6 A second objective is to monitor political developments worldwide, so as to provide early warning of impending conflicts. The Secretary-General is to be advised on measures to prevent, contain or resolve such conflicts. He is to be assisted in undertaking preventive, peacemaking and peace-building activities as approved by the relevant intergovernmental bodies.

1.7 The Department of Political Affairs will collect information about potential and actual disputes and conflicts, analyse information to identify situations in which the United Nations could play a useful role and advise the Secretary-General on what form the action may take. The Department will prepare reports to intergovernmental bodies and implement approved policies. It will also coordinate and collaborate with other departments in the Secretariat, in particular, the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as various United Nations programmes and agencies and regional arrangements and organizations, so that the relevant departments function as an integrated whole under the authority and control of the Secretary-General to address complex issues of a multifaceted nature. The Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs have developed a flow chart of actions - information-sharing, consultations and joint action - for the coordination of their respective activities in the planning and implementing of complex operations in the field. This mechanism, known as the "framework for coordination", covers the departments' activities during routine monitoring and early-warning analysis, assessment of options for preventive actions where possible, fact-finding, planning and implementation of field operations, and conduct of evaluations or lessons-learned exercises. The Department of Political Affairs will assist in enhancing the capacity of regional organizations in early-warning and preventive peacemaking and peace-building activities and facilitate close cooperation and coordination in those matters.

1.8 Activities of the subprogramme will also involve assistance in the preparation of, and participation in, special missions (fact-finding, goodwill, good offices) dispatched by the Secretary-General. Special attention will be paid to the provision of guidance and support to special representatives and special envoys in the field of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and

peace-building. Direct executive responsibility for United Nations missions in the field (other than peace-keeping operations), the primary purpose of which is to prevent, contain or resolve conflicts through peaceful means, rests with the Department.

1.9 The nature of the Organization's involvement in special missions is influenced by the evolution of international situations and is undertaken primarily at the request of the General Assembly or the Security Council and States. It is anticipated that, during the period 1998-2001, activities undertaken on the initiative of the Secretary-General will enhance his overall preventive and peacemaking capabilities in the maintenance of peace and security.

1.10 In implementing the subprogramme, the Department will strive in particular to reinforce the Organization's capacity for early warning and quiet diplomacy and for non-military measures to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts, as well as for resolving those which have erupted. The Department will also endeavour to enhance its capacity with regard to the political aspects of peace-building, especially the definition of the political objectives of peace-building activities and their planning and coordination.

Subprogramme 1.2 Assistance and support to the Secretary-General in the political aspects of his relations with Member States

1.11 The primary objective of this subprogramme, which is implemented by the regional divisions of the Department, is to provide the Secretary-General, continuously, with information, analyses and policy advice to facilitate the political aspects of his relations with Member States. As demand increases for the Organization's services in the maintenance of peace and security, so does interaction between the Secretary-General and representatives of Member States, regional arrangements and organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Interaction involves the support that the Secretary-General provides to Member States in preventing, controlling and resolving conflicts and the support that Member States provide to the Secretary-General in his efforts to that end.

1.12 The Department will prepare background briefs, talking points and profiles for meetings of the Secretary-General. It will also prepare drafts of the Secretary-General's correspondence on political issues with States, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations. The Department maintains and will further develop a central database related to peace and security issues for use by the Secretary-General and senior officials. Contact with regional organizations, relevant non-governmental organizations and other private academic and research institutes will also be maintained as part of this subprogramme to assist the Secretary-General in his political contacts with Member States.

Subprogramme 1.3 Disarmament

1.13 The positive changes seen recently in international relations have facilitated the search for consensus on a number of outstanding disarmament issues. In particular, the positive outcome of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear

Weapons has opened up a more promising path to nuclear disarmament. However, problems related to conventional weapons, especially the proliferation of small arms, including anti-personnel landmines, and illicit trafficking in nuclear materials continue to pose a threat to international security.

1.14 The first objective of this subprogramme is to provide organizational and substantive secretariat support to multilateral bodies entrusted with deliberation and/or negotiation on disarmament issues and to review conferences and other international meetings related to multilateral disarmament agreements. The Centre for Disarmament Affairs is responsible for implementing this subprogramme.

1.15 A second objective of this subprogramme is to monitor and assess current and future trends in the field of disarmament and international security in order to render assistance to the Secretary-General and Member States in their search for appropriate solutions. This would address post-disarmament problems, including the economic and social consequences of disarmament, environmental damage and conversion, which continue to present a challenge for the international community. Particular attention will be paid to the maintenance of the Register of Conventional Arms and its possible regional variants, as important confidence-building measures.

1.16 A third objective will be to promote regional disarmament efforts and initiatives as an essential component of preventive diplomacy and peace-building. Regional solutions will be more vigorously pursued as regional conflicts increasingly pose a threat to peace and security. Regional dialogue on crucial disarmament and security issues will be advanced through the organization of conferences. Member States will be assisted in addressing specific disarmament concerns through the provision of training and advisory services.

1.17 A fourth objective will be to provide impartial, factual information on the disarmament efforts of the United Nations to Member States, parliamentarians, research and academic institutions, and specialized non-governmental organizations through the programme of publications of the Centre and by providing access to its disarmament database.

1.18 This subprogramme is expected to enable Member States to conduct deliberations and negotiations on disarmament issues in a smooth and efficient manner; facilitate the task of the Secretary-General in the conduct of his relations with Member States on disarmament matters; contribute to an integrated approach to issues relating to the maintenance of peace and security using disarmament as a tool of preventive diplomacy and peace-building; and facilitate an exchange of ideas between governmental and non-governmental sectors with a view to promoting a better understanding of the United Nations endeavours in the field of disarmament.

Subprogramme 1.4 Electoral assistance

1.19 The main objective of this subprogramme is to render electoral assistance to Member States, on their request, through provision of necessary technical and advisory support in coordinating their electoral activities. Activities in the

field of electoral assistance have been carried out by the Electoral Assistance Division in response to General Assembly resolution 46/137 of 17 December 1991 and its successive resolutions, namely, resolutions 47/130 and 47/138 of 18 December 1992, 48/131 of 20 December 1993, 49/190 of 23 December 1994 and 50/185 of 22 December 1995, in which it requested the Secretary-General to provide the Division with adequate resources to carry out its mandate.

1.20 The subprogramme will coordinate electoral assistance activities within the United Nations system and with regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Guidelines and operational manuals on electoral assistance will be further developed and a roster of international experts on electoral issues will be maintained and developed. The institutional memory on electoral assistance activities will be enhanced.

1.21 During the period covered by the plan, this subprogramme will contribute to an integrated approach to the maintenance of peace and security by employing electoral assistance as an essential tool of the preventive, peacemaking and peace-building activities of the Secretary-General. The subprogramme will continue to provide electoral assistance to requesting Member States with a view to assisting and strengthening domestic monitors and to providing support to international observers through coordination of their activities. The subprogramme will also focus on strengthening national capacity to organize and conduct democratic elections on a regular basis.

Subprogramme 1.5 Security Council affairs

1.22 The primary objective of this subprogramme is to provide authoritative advice and substantive services to the Security Council and its subsidiary organs in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the provisional rules of procedure of the Council and its past practice. The Security Council Affairs Division will facilitate liaison with presiding officers and members, prepare reports, analyse and research material, follow up the implementation of the Council's decisions and maintain contacts with organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations.

1.23 Given the unpredictable and urgent nature of the myriad of issues that face the Security Council, the provision of effective and continuous services, having regard to Article 28 of the Charter, is of paramount importance. To this end, effective and timely submission of the Council's parliamentary documentation, reports and communications for processing and their timely issuance in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Council and its programme of work will be ensured. Effective coordination of the meetings of the Security Council, its subsidiary organs and working groups and substantive support services provided to fact-finding missions dispatched by it will also continue to be ensured.

1.24 The various sanctions committees and other subsidiary organs and informal working groups of the Security Council will be provided with authoritative advice and substantive services. The Division will continue to be responsible, in particular, for the expeditious processing of applications from Member States for exceptions for humanitarian supplies in accordance with the procedures established by the various sanctions committees.

1.25 In addition, preparation of analytical studies on the implementation and application of the Charter of the United Nations, the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council for the pertinent supplements to the Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council and on 44 Articles of the Charter of the United Nations for inclusion in the Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs, will be undertaken.

Subprogramme 1.6 General Assembly affairs

1.26 The major objective of this subprogramme is to ensure, through the provision of authoritative advice and substantive services, the orderly and procedurally correct conduct of the meetings and the work of the General Assembly, its General Committee and its Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of procedure and established practice of the Assembly. The General Assembly Affairs Division will prepare analytical studies on the rules and procedure of the Assembly and conduct consultations with its President, the presiding officers of the Main Committees, Member States and intergovernmental bodies for the effective scheduling of meetings.

1.27 To facilitate the organization and conduct of the meetings of the General Assembly, the Division will prepare the necessary parliamentary documentation and ensure the correct and duly authorized submission of reports and communications for processing as official General Assembly documents, as well as their timely issuance in accordance with the practice, programme of work and schedule of the Assembly.

1.28 The General Assembly Affairs Division will also conduct consultations and coordinate the assignment of responsibilities for the implementation of all General Assembly resolutions and decisions and follow up to ensure timely action by relevant bodies.

1.29 The fourth objective of the subprogramme is to provide technical advice and substantive services to subsidiary organs and various informal working groups of the whole that have been established by the Assembly to consider major issues that will impact on the work of the Organization.

1.30 The fifth objective of this subprogramme is to provide, in accordance with established practice and the relevant rules of procedure of the General Assembly, substantive services to the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and to follow up the implementation of relevant resolutions of the Assembly.

1.31 This subprogramme will provide the required substantive services and prepare reports of the Trusteeship Council if it should meet, in accordance with its rules of procedure.

1.32 Under this subprogramme, the General Assembly Affairs Division will also prepare analytical studies on the interpretation of relevant articles of the Charter of the United Nations for inclusion in the Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs.

Subprogramme 1.7 Question of Palestine

1.33 The question of Palestine was first considered by the General Assembly at its second session in 1947. By its resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, the Assembly established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and requested it to consider and recommend to it a programme of implementation designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their rights.

1.34 A major objective of this subprogramme is therefore to assist the Committee and the concerned States in the promotion of a solution to the question of Palestine based on the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights. The Division for Palestinian Rights is responsible for providing secretariat services in support of this subprogramme.

1.35 A second objective of the subprogramme will be to assist the Committee in promoting the effective implementation of the agreements reached between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and mobilizing international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. This responds to the positive developments in the negotiations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization since 1993 upon the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, which gave rise to renewed hopes for a final settlement and opened new possibilities for supportive action by the United Nations.

1.36 A third objective will be to encourage interaction and exchange of ideas that would further the search for a solution to the question of Palestine, by providing forums to facilitate consideration of all issues relevant to the solution of the question by Governments, United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and prominent personalities, including Palestinians and Israelis.

1.37 The United Nations computer-based information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL) will continue to be expanded. Coordination will be carried out with relevant departments, organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations and the specialized agencies with regard to certain publications on the question of Palestine and UNISPAL.

1.38 The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/84 A of 15 December 1995 on the question of Palestine, reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the question. The Assembly will therefore continue to renew the relevant mandates until the issue is resolved. Within that context, it is expected that activities carried out under the subprogramme would enhance understanding of the situation with regard to the question of Palestine, thereby contributing to the formulation of policies to resolve this question.